

BMK listening session-notes

General Introduction-

Mangalampalli Balamuralikrishna. The moment we hear the name, we immediately think of the dramatic, the playful, the controversial. Balamurali certainly had a flair for drama, he had his fair share of controversy, and was definitely a maverick in the way he approached music. But what often goes unobserved is his classicism, his traditionalism, and his respect and devotion towards the art of music. In our opinion, Balamurali's music is a case study in paradoxes. His music, while decidedly audience-oriented, is simultaneously introspective and innovative, classical and contemporary, esoteric and exuberant. His music is great, not because of any particular characteristics or highlights, but simply because there is no way to bracket it. His music defies description, for every listener perceives it differently. This session is our humble attempt to decipher these paradoxes that make up Balamurali's music.

1. Shringara Rasamanjarim-Rasamanjari-Dikshitar

Today, the first track we shall hear is a rendition of Shringara Rasamanjarim, in the Ragam Rasamanjari, composed by Mudduswamy Dikshitar. This track has been chosen for two reasons. Firstly, because Balamuralikrishna's handling of Mudduswamy Dikshitar Krithis is quite the paradox in itself. While some Krithis like Dharmasamvardhini or Kaumari Gaurivelavali are sung with near-perfect adherence to the SSP, some other Krithis like Meenakshi Me Mudam Dehi or Vatapi Ganapatim are sung in a form more-or-less akin to their popular forms today. The questions of where and how Balamurali picked these Krithis up certainly merit deeper consideration. Secondly, this track is chosen as a representative of the many Vivaadi Ragams that Balamurali became famous for performing. The delicate handling of the D3 in this Ragam is testament to his particular fondness and flair for such ragams.

Track details-

Violin- Annavarapu Ramaswamy

Mridangam- V Kamalakara Rao

Venue- Madras Music Academy, 21/12/1975

2. Bhairavi Alapanam

The second track for this evening is an excerpt from an elaborate Alapanam in Bhairavi. This track has been chosen to demonstrate Balamurali's handling of these Rakti ragams, as well as his own style of Alapanam. The influences that both G N Balasubramaniam and Parupalli Ramakrishnayya Pantulu had on his music become evident in his style of elaborating the Ragam. There is a clear phrase-oriented logical

progression in the Ragam delineation that also incorporates in part the briskness and sharp turns of phrase characteristic of Parupalligaru's Alapanam.

Track details-

Violin- M Chandrasekharan

Mridangam (not heard in the excerpt)- Umayalpuram K Sivaraman

Venue- Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, 1977

3. Nagaswaravali-Hamsadhwani Tanam

Following the Bhairavi Alapanam, we have an excerpt of Grahabheda Tanam, in two Ragams - Nagaswaravali and Hamsadhwani. The concept of Ragamalika RTPs and Grahabheda RTPs in particular can be said to have been pioneered by Balamurali. The famous Abhogi-Valaji RTPs that he has performed on many instances have inspired numerous artistes to take the idea forward. This excerpt is from the Nagaswaravali-Hamsadhwani RTP suite, a combination that he performed less often. We'd draw the attention of the listeners to the marvellous way in which he differentiates the two Ragams by oscillating the Panchamam (which would be the Rishabham for Hamsadhwani when Grahabhedam is done).

Track details-

Violin- M S Gopalakrishnan

Mridangam (not heard in the extract)- Tanjore Upendran

Venue- Madras Music Academy, 30/12/1966

4. Nagumomu Neraval

The fourth track in today's session is an excerpt of Balamuralikrishna singing Neraval at the line 'Jagamele Paramatma Evarito Moraledudu', from the charanam of Nagumomu Ganaleni, the Krithi in Abheri that he became synonymous with. Neraval isn't a facet of Carnatic music that Balamurali is typically associated with, the primary reason being that Balamurali himself didn't present it often. It is our opinion that Balamurali was a musician with a very interesting aesthetic of 'proportion'. It is erroneously understood by many that Balamurali did not respect Neraval, and hence didn't perform it extensively. This was most definitely not the case. In fact, he truly respected the art of Neraval and wanted to do it complete justice by performing it only when it would fit perfectly into his ideation of the piece presented; he ensured that the Neraval would shine on its own while also perfectly complementing the Sahityabhavam of the composition. This equal emphasis on the Sahityabhavam as well as the individuality of the Neraval segment, is a characteristic of Balamurali's Neraval performances. It is for this very reason that his Neraval renditions are unique. They speak of, or should we say sing of,

his fine grip over Layam and Ragam, and more importantly tell us a lot about how Balamurali perceived proportion and the role of Manodharmam in the presentation of a composition. In this excerpt the highlights are the Khanda Nadai Neraval he performs towards the end, as also the pregnant pause between the Neraval and the continuation of the Charanam.

Track details-

Violin- Annavarapu Ramaswamy

Mridangam- Tanjore Upendran

Venue- The Senate Hall, Trivandrum (Soorya Festival), 4/10/1981

5. Thodi Swaraprastaram

The fifth track for today will be an excerpt of Koruppu Swaraprastaram in the Ragam Thodi. One aspect of Carnatic music that Balamuralikrishna was famous for was his unique approach to Swaraprastaram. His Swaraprastaram bouts were rigorous, energetic and yet frolicsome. His Swaraprastaram was characterized by deceptively simple and straightforward patterns, intelligent alternations between Kampita, Jaaru and straight Gamakams, perfectly negotiated Dhatu Prayogams and octave jumps. In all, his Swaraprastaram was a fantastic mixture of dexterity, vidvat and verve. In this clip, Balamurali effortlessly balances the grandeur of raga Thodi with his trademark 'drama'.

Track details-

Violin- M S Gopalakrishnan

Mridangam- T V Gopalakrishnan (not verified)

Khanjira- V Nagarajan

Venue- Unknown, early 60s

6. Tatwameruga Tarama-Garudadhwani-Tyagaraja

Presented next will be an excerpt from a 78RPM record of his, released in 1958. The Krithi Tatwameruga Tarama in Ragam Garudadhwani is presented. This track has been selected to show exactly how much of an influence G N Balasubramaniam's music had on Balamurali in his early years. Even later, while his intonation, accent and aesthetic would evolve into an entirely new oeuvre that we call Muraliganam, his technique and musical performance would remain heavily based on G N Balasubramaniam's trailblazing style. In this track, we can see that not only his fundamental technique but even his style of presentation was inspired by G N Balasubramaniam in his formative years.

Track details-

Violin- Unknown

Mridangam- M Radhakrishna Raju (not verified)

Morsing- Unknown

LP Record, released in 1958

7. Dashagamakriye-Purvikalyani-Dikshitar

The seventh track of the evening is intended to show Balamurali's spontaneous side. In this excerpt from a rendition of the Krithi Meenakshi Me Mudam Dehi, Balamurali is singing the line 'Veena Vadya Dashagamakriye', and clearly inspired by the word 'Gamakakriye' in the Sahityam, launches off into spontaneous bouts of creating Sangathis, each new Sangathi highlighting a different kind of Gamakam at that very place. This off-the-cuff while still sensitive side of his music is truly remarkable.

Track details-

Violin- Annavarapu Ramaswamy

Mridangam- Inala Ramamohana Rao

Venue- Vijayawada, 3/1/1982

8. Bhamaro Urike-Anandabhairavi-Kshetrappa

The penultimate piece in this session is an excerpt from a rendition of a Padam. There exists a common misconception that Balamurali was a musician who thrived only in Madhyamakalam or Duritakalam, but the fact is that he was highly versatile and dexterous even at slower Kalapramanams. His renditions of Krithis like Na Moralanu Vini (Arabhi - Tyagaraja) and Padams like Aligite Bhagyamaaye (Huseni - Kshetrappa) serve as ample proof of this. Presented here will be an excerpt from the Padam Bhamaro Urike (Emani Thelupudu), a Kshetrappa composition in Anandabhairavi. The delicate way in which he handles the Prayogams to suit the Sahityabhavam of the composition while keeping the Ragabhavam intact is very interesting to observe, and tells us a lot about what he perceived to be the role of the Sahityam in a composition.

Track details-

Violin- Annavarapu Ramaswamy

Mridangam- Srimushnam V Raja Rao

AIR National Programme of Music, broadcast on 15/2/1986

9. Gatibhedapriyagaramalika Thillana-Balamuralikrishna

The final track for this evening will be an excerpt from the Gatibheda Priyagaramalika Thillana, Balamurali's own composition. This excerpt is chosen for the following reasons. Firstly, it is an excellent demonstration of his compositional approach and talent. But more importantly, we feel that this composition - particularly the way it ends with a small sketch of the Ragam Gurupriya - perfectly encapsulates the soul of Balamurali's music. His music is daring as well as traditional, complex while also simple, mysterious and yet inexplicably alluring. Perhaps he described it best, when he said - "I don't sing Karnataka Sangeetham. I sing Murali Sangeetham".

Track details-

Violin- V V Subrahmanyam

Mridangam- Tanjore Upendran

Venue- Unknown, late 70s